This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS LILONGWE 000123

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV KDEM MI
SUBJECT: HOPES FADE FOR OPPOSITION'S "GRAND COALITION"

REF: A. 03 LILONGWE 1202

    ¶B. LILONGWE 28
    ¶C. LILONGWE 38

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Republican Party (RP) President Gwanda Chakuamba and
People's Progressive Movement (PPM) President Aleke Banda
were elected presidential candidate and running mate of the
7-party opposition alliance known as the "Mgwirizano
Coalition" on February 13. Political activists had hoped to
create a Kenya-style "grand coalition" alternative to the
ruling United Democratic Front (UDF), but rivalries have kept
the opposition's two most influential parties -- Brown
Mpinganjira's National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and John
Tembo's Malawi Congress Party (MCP) -- out of the alliance's
ranks. Without the NDA and MCP, the Mgwirizano Coalition is
a conglomeration of minor parties with a few major political
figures (including Vice President Justin Malewezi). Weak
grassroots support, a lack of institutional structures, and
poor geographical coverage limit the Coalition's chances for
success in the May elections. In its current form, its most
likely role will be to split the opposition's vote. END
SUMMARY.

SOMETHING OF A COALITION IS BORN

¶2. (U) After weeks of clergy-led discussions, the Republican
Party (RP), Movement for Genuine Democratic Change (MGODE),
People's Progressive Movement (PPM), National Unity Party
(NUP), Malawi Forum For Unity and Development (MAFUNDE),
People's Transformation Party (PETRA), and Malawi Democratic
Party (MDP) signed an MOU on January 23 to contest May 18's
general elections as the "Migwirizano Coalition." On
February 13, the Coalition selected a presidential candidate
and running mate by rating nominees from each party on
pre-selected criteria. Winning the most votes, RP President
Gwanda Chakuamba became the presidential candidate and PPM
President Aleke Banda took his side as running mate.

¶3. (SBU) Taking part in the talks, but notably absent from
the MOU, were the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and National
Democratic Alliance (NDA). Publicly, the MCP and NDA have
cited various reasons for not joining the Coalition,
including concerns over the method by which the presidential
candidate and running mate were chosen and worries over the
long-term viability of the Coalition, which has done little
work so far in harmonizing its consituents' platforms or in
post-election planning. (Comment: It is clear, however, that
behind-the-scenes wrangles over who would lead any coalition
have been a major stumbling block, with both the MCP and NDA
holding out for the top positions.)

...BUT WILL IT HOLD?

¶4. (U) Despite the signing of the MOU, the Coalition remains
tenuous. A faction of MGODE, led by Greenwell Mwamondwe and
Sam Kandodo Banda, reportedly left a Coaltion candidate
selection meeting to protest the absence of the NDA and MCP.
A fissure has reportedly developed in the party over
continued support to the Coalition, and newspaper accounts
have claimed similar internal frictions surfacing within PPM.

COMMENT

¶5. (SBU) The Mgwirizano Coalition has none of the unity or
strength opposition activists hoped it would. In its current
form, it is little more than a conglomeration of minor
parties -- most of which are not represented in Parliament.
While the names of Chakuamba, Banda, and Malewezi lend the
Coalition political credibility, they do little to extend its
power base.

¶6. (SBU) Time is running out on hopes for a grand opposition
alliance. While the MCP or NDA might still come to some
accommodation with the Coalition, the Malawi Electoral
Commission's February 25 deadline for the formal announcement
of presidential candidates is fast approaching. And if the
NDA, MCP, and the Coalition all put forward their own
candidates (as appears likely), the opposition will be badly
split -- much to the advantage of the ruling United
Democratic Front. END COMMENT.
BROWNING